United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | San Gabriel River Ranger District | 110 N. Wabash Ave. Glendora, CA 91741 626-335-1251 Voice 626-447-8992 TTY

File Code: 1950
Date: May 15, 2009

Dear Interested Individuals, Organizations and Agencies:

The U.S. Forest Service, Angeles National Forest, San Gabriel River Ranger District and the Pacific Southwest Research Station, San Dimas Experimental Station (managed by Riverside Fire Lab) are seeking public comment on the Proposed Action for the Invasive Plant Treatment Project. The project is located within the Forest boundary in the San Gabriel, Big and Little Dalton, and San Dimas drainages. The project area includes approximately 23,000 acres and 525 miles of stream channels. The majority of the project is located in Los Angeles County, with a small portion on the eastern edge in San Bernardino County, California (see enclosed project area map). A detailed description of the project can be downloaded from the Forest website http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/angeles/projects/ under "Projects and Plans" and "Invasive Plant Treatment Project, San Gabriel River Ranger District and San Dimas Experimental Forest." Hard copies and/or CDs are available upon request. A summary is provided below:

Project Background

The San Gabriel River Ranger District has been implementing an arundo (*Arundo donax*) eradication project since 1998. The District has been successful in controlling the expansion of the populations, but the invasive plant species has not been completely eradicated from the District and needs continued treatment. The original decision is over 10 years old. The purpose of this Environmental Assessment is to update and expand the original project's purpose and need, project area, and approved activities.

Project Description

The Responsible Officials with the Forest Service are proposing the eradication, control, containment, and/or suppression of existing and new infestations of invasive plant species that are undesirable, noxious, harmful, injurious, or poisonous, including but not limited to State listed high priority noxious weeds in the San Gabriel, Big and Little Dalton, and San Dimas canyon drainages from the Forest boundary to their headwaters (see enclosed map of the project area). The width of the project area would include these channels and average 100 to 350 feet from the edge of the high water mark (with a few areas that go beyond a quarter mile from the edge of the high water mark). Treatment areas would include non-National Forest System lands if the landowners/managers would like to enter into an agreement authorized under the Wyden Amendment. The term of this project would be 15 years with the intent to review and, if needed, update the project, effects analysis, and possibly purpose and need after 15 years of implementation. In general, the proposed action would cap the maximum treatment of the invasive plant species populations and future expansions of these species to 145 miles and/or 3,200 acres annually, depending on funding and staffing. Priority for treatment would be: arundo (*Arundo donax*), tamarisk (*Tamarix* spp.), tree-of-heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), other woody invasives, and forb invasives.

The project incorporates an adaptive management strategy that allows the project to be modified based on invasive plant expansion, new infestations of invasive plants in the project area, and new and more effective treatment methods. This adaptive management strategy would allow for rapid response for control and/or containment. Any changes can be part of the proposed action as long as the scope of the treatment and the effects are within those addressed in the analysis. Any new information would be reviewed by an appropriate interdisciplinary team; documented; and, treatment approved by the appropriate responsible official through a letter to the files. The documentation would be included in the project planning record available for public review. This strategy would not allow for the use of new herbicides not addressed in this document; would not

allow for “broadcast” (including aerial) applications of herbicides; would not allow herbicide use during pre-emergence of vegetation (preventing the invasive weed from germinating); and, would not allow large and heavy equipment into the treatment areas (e.g. large bull dozers). The use of any new herbicides, broadcast applications, pre-emergent herbicide application, or use of large and heavy equipment would require new National Environmental Policy Act analysis, public involvement, documentation, and decision.

Prescriptions for treatment would follow integrated weed management (IWM) for each treatment site. No single management technique is perfect for all invasive plant treatment situations. Multiple management actions are required for effective treatment. Integrated weed management includes an approach for selecting methods for eradicating, containing, controlling, and/or suppressing invasive plants in coordination with other resource management activities to achieve optimum management goals and objectives.

Proposed treatment methods include biological control (e.g. insects, pathogens), manual/mechanical, flaming torch method, and herbicide. Depending on the size of the treated material (invasive weeds), additional treatment of this material (biomass) could include pile and burning adjacent to or at the treatment area (at a minimum, outside the 25-year floodplain), drag and remove off site (if vehicle access is adjacent to treatment area), or helicopter sling load material out for disposal off site (if the access is poor and pile and burning in place is not an option). If the biomass material is minimal, the material could be scattered above the high waterline to dry and decompose. The selection of treatment method would be dependent on: time of year; severity of infestation; presence of sensitive resources (e.g. native plants and wildlife species, including protected species); degree of intermixing of invasive species with sensitive native habitats; access; proximity to surface water; and, budget.

The seven herbicides that are considered as treatment options in the Proposed Action include: glyphosate, triclopyr, imazapyr, sulfometuron methyl, aminopyralid, hexazinone, and chlorsulfuron. Herbicide treatment would comply with state and federal pesticide laws, would be applied strictly in accordance with the label directions, and would be applied under the direction of a licensed applicator.

The project area has been divided into 14 branches and maximum treatment acres have been included in the project design for each branch. The branches include Morris Reservoir, San Gabriel Reservoir, West Fork (of the San Gabriel drainage), San Gabriel Wilderness, North Fork (of the San Gabriel drainage), East Fork (of the San Gabriel drainage), Heaton Flats, Heaton Flats-Sheep Mountain Wilderness, Cattle Canyon, Cattle Canyon-Sheep Mountain Wilderness, South Dalton, Big Dalton Reservoir, San Dimas (drainage), and Headwaters in Forest (in both San Dimas Experimental Forest and San Gabriel River Ranger District.

Monitoring and restoration are also key components to the proposed action. Monitoring is intended to determine the effectiveness of treatment, quickly treat new populations, monitor and possibly provide adaptive management based on unanticipated effects, and monitor the restoration of treated sites. To ensure treated areas are not re-established with invasive plant species, restoration activities may be required. All surveys/monitoring would be documented in the project files.

No new permanent or temporary roads are being proposed with this action. Any access will be by foot or by vehicles using existing roads. Helicopters may be used for transportation in remote areas where access is difficult, including possibly the wilderness.

Project implementation may begin as early as the fall of 2010 based on NEPA analysis and decision.

The proposed activities are consistent with the objectives and management direction of the Angeles National Forest Management Plan.

How to Comment and Timeframe

This public comment period is the scoping stage under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. This scoping notice is intended to provide those interested in, or affected by, this project with an opportunity to make their concerns known. We encourage you to be as specific as possible in your comments with regard to potential effects of the proposed action.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this project will be most helpful if they are submitted by June 15, 2009, which is the end of the 30-day public scoping period. The office business hours for those providing hand-delivered comments are 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments may be provided during normal business hours via telephone by calling Project Planner Marian Kadota at (805) 220-6388. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Microsoft Word (.doc) to mkadota@fs.fed.us. Comments in written, hand delivered, or facsimile forms can be submitted to District Resource Assistant Esmeralda Bracamonte, 110 N. Wabash Avenue, Glendora, CA 91741; (626) 914-3790 (FAX). Please ensure it is clear that your comments are for the Invasive Plant Treatment Project.

The preliminary Environmental Assessment (EA) will be completed and made available, along with other notices for the project, to those who have provided sufficient contact information, submitted comments, and to those who have requested to be added to the Invasive Plant Treatment Project mailing list. The preliminary EA is tentatively planned to be completed in the summer of 2010.

Comments received in response to this request, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection.

For further information regarding this proposed action including requesting detailed copies or a CD of the proposed action, contact Marian Kadota at (805) 220-6388 or Esmeralda Bracamonte at (626) 335-1251 ext. 238. We encourage your input by reviewing the proposal as provided in summary through this letter and described in detail on our website and appreciate your interest in the management of the Ranger District and San Dimas Experimental Forest. Should you be interested in volunteering with the monitoring and/or surveys for this project, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

L'TANGA WATSON
San Gabriel River District Ranger
Angeles National Forest
110 N. Wabash Ave.
Glendora, CA 91741

DAVID R. WEISE, Ph.D.
Supervisory Research Forester, Project Leader
Pacific Southwest Research Station
4955 Canyon Crest Dr.
Riverside, CA 92507

enclosure